

Tie drives down Provo River required hard work, bravery

By LYNDIA CARTER
Special to The Daily Herald

Some believe that only Paul Bunyan could tie up a river, but Samuel S. Jones and a few other Provo businessmen got pretty good at it themselves in the 1880s and '90s.

Every year during the high-water spring runoffs, logging companies conducted tie drives, clogging the Provo River with thousands of railroad ties destined for Utah's expanding rail lines.

Like cattle drives, it took the "bravest and nerviest" of men to drive ties from Hailstone Ranch (near the current-day Jordanelle Dam) to the railroad bridges in west Provo, according to Albert Jones, who wrote a biography of his brother Sam.

And the ties had to be branded just like cattle so they could be sorted at the end of the drive.

The work was hazardous. Crews used light poles topped with sharp iron spikes and hooks to loosen tie jams that sometimes were more than a mile long. Workers had to be fast and agile to reach shore safely once a jam broke. Dunkings in the ice cold water were common.

Although timber harvesting had been a major activity in Utah since the arrival of Mormon pioneers in 1847, tie drives didn't become common until the building of the transcontinental railroad in the late

working together through Provo's Co-operative Store.

Crews of men and boys went into the mountains and hauled ties out by conventional methods.

Another surge in railroad construction occurred in 1878 with the development of coal mines in Carbon County. Narrow gauge ties were needed for the Pleasant Valley line through Spanish Fork Canyon.

The Daily Herald
Celebrates the



Logo Used By Permission of the Utah Statehood Centennial Commission

Jones, one of the founders of the Provo Co-op, knew that several thousand standard-gauge ties were left over from the Utah Southern project. He bought them for \$500, hired crews to cut two feet off each tie and sold them for a tidy profit to George Goss to be used on the narrow gauge line. The two-foot ends were used for firewood.

That venture marked the beginning of Jones' career as a major tie contractor, a business he pursued to the turn of the century.

to 18 days, which was just about as long as the high water lasted.

But high water didn't always last. In 1889, thousands of ties were stranded along the river from Midway to Provo Canyon when the water level fell, according to newspaper accounts.

The work was hard and dangerous, but the wages seemed good since drives were one of the few ways to make cash in an economy that was still based primarily on agriculture and the barter system. Tie drivers received from \$3.50 to \$5 a day.

Fall and winter were the prime times for cutting. Men were paid 12.5 cents a piece for cutting and hewing or 25 cents a piece for hauling ties to the riverbank. "Hackers" could hew about 20 ties a day each, using broad axes, double-bitted axes, peelers, saws and other tools of their own devising.

Contractors were paid 50 cents for first-class ties, 40 cents for seconds and narrow gauge ties and 30 cents for third-class ties.

During the actual drive, loggers worked up to five miles in each direction from camp, according to *The History of the Wasatch-Cache National Forest* by Charles Peterson and Linda Speth. Camp was moved a few miles every two to three days.

A team of 15 to 18 men came behind, cleaning up and dislodging ties that had become stranded



Photo courtesy of Clarence Taylor

Workers move logs during a railroad tie drive on the Provo River. The bridge in the background is over 12th North in Provo. Dan Jones, standing on the left, was project manager.

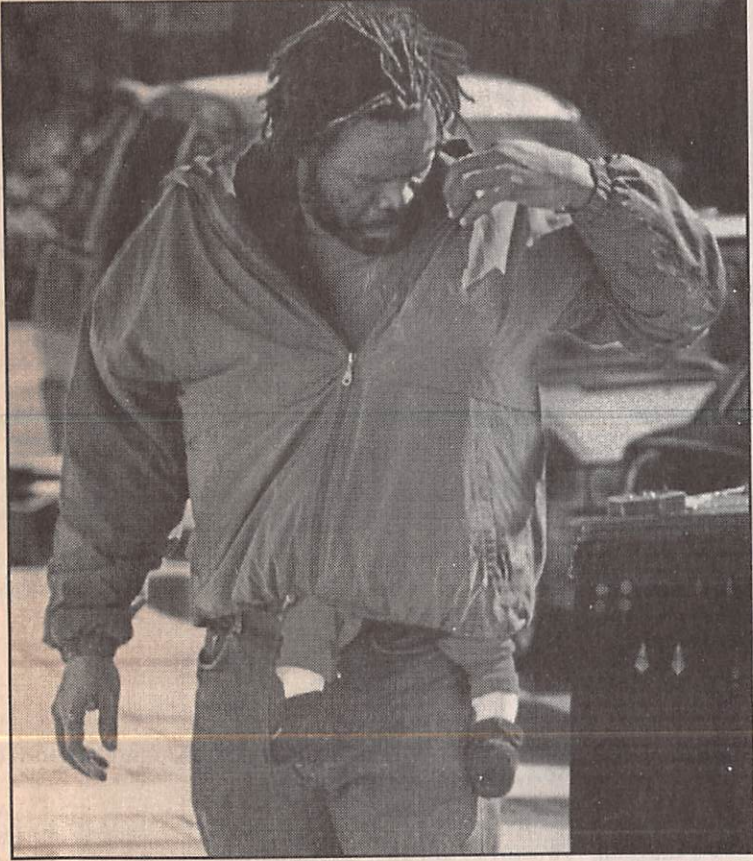
Ties from Boulder Creek joined those from North Fork, then South Fork, the last to rise with the spring runoffs.

When the water was high enough, the drive proceeded down the main channel.

After ties reached the mouth of Provo Canyon, advance crews blocked irrigation ditches to keep the logs in the main channel. Near the city a curb dam blocked the ties so they could be removed from the river, sorted and hauled to the rail-

road depot for shipment to construction camps.

Lyndia Carter is a former teacher and is currently an independent researcher and writer living in Springville.



AP Photo

Shelter from the storm

Herbert Emerson checks on his 3-month-old son, Darrell, who is tucked away from the rain at the cable car turnaround at Fisher-

'Modern-day Bluebeard'

By DAVID GOODMAN
Associated Press Writer

DETROIT — Women in Lowell Amos' life keep dying, and the similarities in the deaths have some people calling the handsome, bespectacled businessman a modern-day Bluebeard.

His three wives and mother all died while living with him. In all four cases, Amos was the last person to see them alive, delayed reporting the deaths and cleaned up the scene before police arrived, authorities said.

"Is Mr. Amos unlucky in love?" District Judge Deborah Lewis Langston asked. "I have my own opinion."

Langston found enough evidence Tuesday to order Amos to stand trial in the cocaine death of

his third wife, 37-year-old Roberta.

The judge then looked down at the three-time widower, with slicked hair and dark suit, and told him, "May God have mercy on your soul."

Roberta Amos died Dec. 1994, following a Christmas party for her husband's employment agency at a Detroit hotel.

Amos, 52, told police his wife died of an accidental cocaine overdose, but a medical examiner found 15 times the amount of the drug present in a typical overdose death.

Amos was arrested in November in Las Vegas after an 11-month investigation.

Langston called him a "modern-day Bluebeard" — a folk character

OUR MOST POPULAR EQUIPMENT

FITNESS



Goddard, in his recollections, explained the sequence of the deaths. A boom was built at the junction of the north and south forks of the Provo River so that ties could be collected from various tributaries. As early as possible each spring, workers would throw thousands of ties from stacks into the headwaters of the Provo River.

By the early 1880s, timber supplies close to communities along the Wasatch Front had become seriously depleted — trees were new sources, so Jones and others went to the headwaters of the Provo River. From there, what better way to transport ties than down the river?

Actually Jones and other contractors were not the first to consider using the river. Archibald Gardner had explored the possibilities as early as 1853, but nothing came of his idea. Then in 1883, the Smith brothers conducted the first timber drive down the river to their sawmill at the mouth of Provo Canyon. They found, however, that floating large long logs was not very practical since they lodged so easily in the stream bed. Smaller pieces could make their way without much trouble. Ties, obviously, could make it. The first tie drive took place when the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad ordered some 140,000 ties for its line between Provo and Price.

Railroad construction placed additional demands on an already over-harvested timber supply. Woodsmen had to range farther and farther into the mountains to find good timber, and as they did so, transporting logs became more and more difficult.

However, in 1867, contractors for the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads discovered that spring runoffs enabled them to float pre-cut ties down the Bear River from the north slopes of the High Uintas. The idea for tie drives was born, but it wouldn't be used on a regular basis on the Provo River for some time.

After the driving of the Golden Spike at Promontory in 1869, the clamor for ties continued as branch rail lines spread throughout Utah. As the Utah Southern line made its way into Utah Valley in the 1870s, ties were supplied largely under the direction of local Mormon Church leaders and businessmen.

The largest combined drive that year. Drives typically took 15



Where is

Columbia Lane?

for Bridge Bk

1230

12th North River

